



EXPANDING COMMUNITY ROLE FOR ASPIRA DEFINED

PLANNED ADVOCACY GIVEN PRIORITY

A fresh interpretation of Aspira's role emerged from the first annual meeting of Executive Directors of Aspira affiliates. The meeting was held at the new offices of Aspira of America in New York on June 4-6, and was called to review the accomplishments of the first year of operations of Aspira's year-old affiliates, to seek solutions to common problems and, perhaps most important, to plan an expanding community role for Aspira.

The first day's meeting opened with a seminar on "The Agency as an Advocate." Sitting in on this discussion were Dr. George Brager and Dr. Charles Grosser, Professors of Social Work at Columbia University. The purpose of the seminar was to define the role of Aspira as an agency of change, and to outline a program of goal setting and organized, planned advocacy to accelerate the progress of the Puerto Rican community in an indifferent society.

As an agency which emphasizes education it was agreed that Aspira should apply strong pressure to the restructuring of the archaic school systems which, by their nature, fail to serve culturally alienated minorities. Antonia Pantoja, founder of Aspira, was an active and eloquent participant in the seminar. "We must not become complacent because of our success," Miss Pantoja said. "Each year more Puerto Rican high school graduates go on to college, but, in itself, this is very little. Our commitment is not merely to produce Puerto Rican college graduates. We must revitalize the inner-city Puerto Rican community. We are not just helping individuals. We are helping to preserve and strengthen Puerto Rican culture. Aspira must set an example for all Aspirantes and all Puerto Ricans. We must take a leadership position in the movement toward dynamic social change. Otherwise Aspirantes and Puerto Ricans in general, who are now running out of patience, will turn away from us and our potential for leadership towards other leaders with other methods."

Louis Núñez, president of Aspira of America, emphasized that "our goal is to gain college admission for all Puerto Rican children at the same level as the general population, not just to help those who make it into academic high schools. Accordingly, we must and will work even harder at keeping our children in schools from grade school up. We will badger school boards, encourage parents to join and fight in P.T.A.'s, cultivate school principals or work for their dismissal, whichever is necessary, to achieve our rights. We must remember that we accomplish



Key Staff Ponders Difficult Question At Two-Day Session

nothing if we help our students to take better advantage of the educational system when the system itself is deteriorating."

This attention to an expanding role for Aspira is possible today because Aspira has succeeded so well in establishing its most basic program—educational counseling—in New York and in the newly organized affiliates.

There was striking unanimity among those present that the history and experience of Aspira in New York has made it possible to create effective Aspira organizations at the new locations in a year's time or less. Already college enrollment by Puerto Rican youngsters in Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark and San Juan has more than quadrupled through the efforts of the young Aspira affiliates.

This Fall more than 1,200 Puerto Rican high school graduates will be entering American colleges and universities, made possible by Aspira's educational counseling program, and aided by scholarships secured with the aid of Aspira.

Mr. Rafael Villafane, Executive Director of Aspira of Philadelphia, pointed out that in Philadelphia "the community and the Board of Education have welcomed and encouraged our efforts and, by and large, have been highly cooperative. But this is so because, in part, we have until now complemented the school system and aided it in a task it had largely overlooked. We are now ready to assume a stronger role as citizens and as a social agency in determining how the educational system will be reshaped to serve the needs of all students."

Mrs. Sylvia Fox, Executive Director of Aspira of Chicago, announced the development of several special programs for the Summer of 1970. College credit is available to the 100 Aspirantes who have enrolled in a special group of courses

(Please turn to page 2)

arranged with the assistance of major Chicago educational institutions and financed by a private grant. The youngsters will study Puerto Rican culture, group dynamics, critical thinking and the problems of minority groups in urban areas.

In New Jersey, Mr. John Rosario, Executive Director, announced that members of Aspira clubs have formed and are now publishing a community newspaper. "This undertaking has provided our students, many for the first time, with the sense of responsibility and social power which comes from tangible and socially productive work." Aspira of New Jersey provided seed money for the newspaper, and it is now self-supporting.

The meeting closed with a restatement of principles by Louis Nuñez. "Our goal," he said, "is the strengthening, through education, of the Puerto Rican community in America. Our programs are educational counseling, leadership development and the vigorous advocacy of significant change in the bankrupt teaching system. To assure the success of these programs, all of which directly affect our youth, will require a new level of community organization. Most important in this organizational effort will be the constructive involvement of students in all aspects of policy making and programming."

Highlights Reported

Some highlights of the year's activities reported by executive directors of Aspira affiliates:

— In Philadelphia during the first full year of operations 8 Aspira clubs have been formed. The membership consists of half the Puerto Rican high school students in the city.

— In Newark, N.J. 135 Aspirantes will have applied to college by the end of June. When Aspira of New Jersey was formed there were only 150 Puerto Rican college students in the entire state, some of them out-of-state residents.

— In Chicago Mrs. Sylvia Fox reports that Puerto Rican college students are participating in the tutoring and counseling of Aspirantes. As a by-product the college students themselves are provided with a strengthened motivation to continue their own studies.

— In New York—oldest of the affiliates—more than 900 students will be placed in college this Fall.



ASPIRA BOARD CONVENES: Members of the Board of Aspira of America are shown at June meeting. They are, from l. to r., Manuel Casiano, Blanca Cedeño, Gilbert Ortiz, M.D., Chairman, Louis Nuñez, Olga Gandara, Francisco Trilla, M.D., Ivan E. Irizarry and Jose Moncosse. Also attending were Herman Badillo and Sister Isolina Ferre.

IN NEW JERSEY: A DRAMATIC SIGN OF HOPE

Newark, New Jersey has become the national embodiment of urban decay and despair. Educational statistics about Puerto Ricans in that city tell the story: Out of 7,810 Puerto Rican students in the school system last year, there were only 96 who had survived to the 12th grade.

John Rosario, youthful executive director of Aspira in New Jersey, says that "we are working to rekindle a spark



John Rosario

which had almost been smothered." In the one year since Aspira was established there, 315 youngsters have become involved in the Aspira process of counseling and leadership development. Out of that group, 85 were assisted in applying for work-study grants and scholarship aid to carry on their studies at the college level.

Aspira estimates that as of 1969, Puerto Rican college students in the entire state numbered only 150. The statewide Puerto Rican population is 150,000.

The direct way in which Aspira is assisting young people in New Jersey was suggested by Mr. Rosario in his first Annual Report which included the following dramatic illustration of Aspira's impact on one young man:

J. R. is a 19-year-old senior. He is one of eight children and lives in a project apartment. His school grades are fair to poor, except in math where he is getting all A's.

Last Fall his mother called Aspira, apologized for having to speak in Spanish and asked if her son could be helped. He wanted to drop out of school and she was convinced that he was on drugs. An appointment was set up with a counselor. He missed the appointment so the counselor tracked him down in school. After the young man agreed to come to the center for a conference, the counselor learned that he was frequently truant in attendance and no one at the school knew what to do to help him.

The young man kept the second appointment at Aspira. He related his problems at home ... overcrowding, lack of money ... and at school ... language difficulties which made him ashamed to speak up in class. He was older than his schoolmates because he had been left back when he transferred from Puerto Rico.

Joining an Aspira Club, he began to experience for the first time in his adolescent life a sense of belonging rather than alienation. Encouraged by new feelings of confidence he played an active role in Aspira activities. He prepared for, took and scored well in math on the college boards. As expected his other scores were only fair.

Aspira helped him apply to college and the efforts were rewarded with a full scholarship to an eastern university.

At a lunch meeting of business, education and civic

leaders of Newark in late May, Hilda Hidalgo, chairman of Aspira, said that "We are offering a way to change the Puerto Rican problem into the Puerto Rican contribution to America."

FUND RAISING SETS RECORD

At the June 6 meeting of the Board of Directors of Aspira of America it was reported that since December, 1968 Aspira had received grants and gifts of \$448,000 from private sources.

Louis Nuñez, who was elected President of Aspira of America at the meeting, announced that no Puerto Rican youth development agency had ever achieved this level of financial assistance from the private sector. The funds raised were primarily from foundations and corporations and augment a development grant of \$750,000 made by the Ford Foundation in the Fall of 1968. In addition, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has contributed \$75,000 for the fiscal year ending July 1, 1970.

Mr. Nuñez noted that in order to sustain Aspira's expansion program and enable it to grow over the next two years another \$1.8 million will be required. "With the strengthening of Aspira's own professional leadership and with the active support of such people as Teodoro Moscoso, Manuel Casiano, and Dr. Juan Rodríguez de Jesús, I am confident that the goal will be achieved," Mr. Nuñez said.

450 HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS ATTEND N.Y. CONFERENCE

Next year's contingent of Puerto Rican college applicants began its preparations by attending the 4th Annual College Conference on May 7 at the Statler Hilton Hotel. Represented at the Conference were the City and State Universities of New York and 49 private institutions, including Fairleigh Dickinson, Princeton, Rensselaer, Columbia, Pratt Institute, NYU, Amherst, Hofstra, Adelphi and Fordham.

The colleges met at a luncheon session to prepare for the expectations and questions of the 450 students present at the round-table discussions.

Carmen Luciano, a third-year student at Lehman College, and a former Aspirante, was the keynote speaker. Urging the young people to keep moving ahead, she said, "El corazón latino is much too concerned, much too loving, much too beautiful to respond with a harsh 'no' to our people's plea... Dedication to the community is essential but if you are anxious to give the very best you can, you must get the very best education you can.

"Each one of you has a special role to play in our community. Each one of you has something unique to give to our people. We have a great need for teachers and doctors but we will also need good architects and capable businessmen, engineers and other specialists. We need them so we can show the world that we can master any and every realm of knowledge and skill we desire."

Over 900 Students Enrolled in College; Wide Expansion Sought for New Year

Aspira in New York, while matching last year's record number of Aspirantes entering college, is concerned that the number still falls far short of the potential.

Mrs. Maria Mercado, newly appointed Director of the Scholarship and Loan Center, reports that over 900 Puerto Ricans will enroll as college freshmen this September, approximately the same number as last year. But during the previous four years this number had nearly doubled each year. Despite all efforts, the agency was able to reach fewer than half of the Puerto Rican seniors in the city, including 1,300 Aspirantes.

"The Scholarship Center has developed a new strategy for next year in order to contact ALL high schools, to reach ALL Puerto Rican students and to approach EVERY state and city college," says Mrs. Mercado. The general focus will be on schools in the Northeast which are better able to provide financial assistance and are closer to the students' homes (an important factor in their remaining at college for the duration of their education).

Most of the students to be reached attend some 21 academic and vocational high schools. With the help of additional staff and the cooperation of the Board of Education, Aspira will be represented in each of these critical schools.

"Only by being on the spot with the students," Mrs. Mercado said, "can Aspira create a climate of hopefulness and provide the necessary information needed to let students know that post-high school opportunities do exist."

"Aspira counselors also serve as proof to the students that they too can make it," she added.

Puerto Rican Leaders Join Aspira



Dr. Rodríguez

Dr. Rodríguez, a new member of The National Development Committee, is an economist, attorney and former businessman. He is a key figure in the Commonwealth's economic development program. He received his education at the University of Michigan, University of Puerto Rico and Harvard, where he was granted a doctorate in law.

Mr. Badillo, who was made a member of the Board of Directors, is a partner in the Wall Street law firm Strook, Strook, and Lavan. A graduate of Brooklyn Law School, he is a former Commissioner for Relocation of New York City. He served as Borough President for a four-year term which ended in 1969.

Louis Nieves: From Fox Street, A Leader

To most New Yorkers the name Fox Street in the Bronx today summons up the same visions of poverty and social disorder as Hell's Kitchen and Five Points on the lower East Side. But Fox Street is also capable of providing important youthful leaders for the community. Louis Nieves who since November, 1969, has been Executive Director of Aspira in New York, was born on Fox Street thirty-one years ago.

Growing Up in San Juan

Mr. Nieves' life and his achievements represent in many ways Aspira's ideals; he has shown that it is possible to overcome some of the toughest obstacles to personal achievement that society can put in one's way.

Mr. Nieves spent eight years of his childhood living in San Juan where he had been sent at the age of one to help speed his recovery from a serious infection. There he lived with his grandparents in a place known, ironically, as La Perla, "The Pearl." It's a ramshackle collection of homes built on the side of a cliff overlooking the blue waters of the Caribbean. Visitors to the historic Spanish-built fortress El Morro can glimpse it over heavy stone walls which protect it from the sea.

He returned to New York and entered P.S. 62 which then, as now, had a high percentage of Spanish-speaking students and drop-outs. After a semester at George Washington High School, his older sister suggested that he take a test for Barnard Preparatory School. Although his weak education caused him to fail most of the test, he did score well on the reading part. Fortunately, the head of the school felt that reading ability, more than any other achievement standards, truly showed an individual's capability. Louis was re-interviewed and then admitted. He became the first Puerto Rican to attend Barnard Prep on scholarship.

After high school, Louis entered Boston University. He continued working to support himself with some help from his family. In Boston he worked steadily 20 to 30 hours a week and completed his college education in the usual four years.

Interested in continuing his education, he returned to New York and entered the Baruch School of City University where he studied at night and in 1964 received a Master of Business Administration. During this time he also held his first jobs in youth work.

Two Years in Hawaii

He worked as a vocational counselor for a city program known as J.O.I.N. and shortly after receiving his Masters degree he went to work for the Job Corps as a counselor. From 1965 to 1967 he worked at the University of Hawaii in the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development Center. There, while supervising research programs in delinquency, he also did advanced studies in psychology towards a doctoral degree. In 1967 he returned to New York where he took up a teaching position with the New York Institute of Technology where he instructed in psychology, testing and statistics.

Two years ago in 1968 Louis joined Aspira as Program Director. In June 1969 he became ~~Assistant~~ Executive Director and last Fall, with the formation of Aspira of America, took on the role of Executive Director of Aspira, New York. Today Aspira has a staff of 70 including over 40 full-time professionals in education and leadership development work.

Mr. Nieves is married and lives in Englewood, New Jersey with his wife, Alicia, whom he met at Boston University. They have a one-year-old daughter.

DEVELOPMENTS IN SAN JUAN

A prominent business leader, José J. Moscoso, head of a chain of drug stores on the Island, has been elected new chairman of the board of Aspira of San Juan. He is the brother of Teodoro Moscoso, chairman of Aspira's National Development Committee.

Newly appointed as Executive Director of the Island-based agency is Hilda Maldonado, a University of Puerto Rico graduate and a social worker previously employed in industry. Miss Maldonado received her masters degree at the University in 1969.

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